

While it is not necessary to be precisely on time for receptions, one should not arrive too late; it is not pleasant for the hosts to wait in empty reception rooms, and they are always appreciative of guests who arrive on time. By the same token, there is no need to linger beyond the time specified in the invitation, unless expressly invited to do so, even if the buffet is still undepleted.

Some dinner guests make a practice of arriving very late. Such behaviour is extremely ill-bred when one is invited to a private meal, since delicate dishes cannot wait. It also indicates a lack of consideration for the other guests, who are forced, so to speak, to wait upon the latecomer's convenience.

As a general rule, a host does not wait for a tardy guest more than half an hour beyond the time indicated in the invitation, and the latter must take the meal where it is at the moment of his arrival. The guest, for his part, must do everything possible to let his hosts know of his situation.

There are countries where it is understood that guests should not arrive until some time after the hour indicated in the invitation and where there is a wide latitude in this regard. Officers can only observe the rules of society in the country they are living in, since they are not called upon to change them. However, they should not practice these habits in countries where they are not in vogue.

Generally speaking, when a diplomatic agent receives an invitation from his head of mission, he should arrive early (before any outside guests, or at least five minutes ahead of time). Similarly, he should always remain at dinners and almost always at receptions until the last outside guests have gone. At any other official reception or dinner, one never leaves before the Head of State or the Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs or, in other words, before the guest of honour.

8 Receiving line

For some occasions, notably receptions on the national day, a receiving line is formed to enable guests to present their compliments. The line should be kept as short as possible, since it is not designed for conversation. When there is a guest of honour, the order of the receiving line is: host, guest of honour, hostess and, finally, wife of the guest of honour. Note that the host is always the first person in the receiving line.

It is not usual to have a receiving line at a dinner.